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Exploring English Pronunciation Pedagogy in EFL Classrooms

外语课堂中英语语音教学探讨

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Synopsis

This thesis delves into the literature on pronunciation pedagogy, pinpoints the phonological challenges for practitioners at both segmental and suprasegmental levels, examines the effect students' cultural frames of reference inherent in Chinese EFL classrooms have on their English pronunciation learning and the implications for pronunciation instruction, and proposes a framework for pronunciation pedagogy in Chinese EFL classrooms on a learnable and teachable scale. This study is of great significance to classroom teachers interested in examining their teaching and developing more effective ways of maximizing their students' communication competence.

Since there is no single fixed and fast rule existing for teaching pronunciation, an eclectic approach drawing upon a variety of research findings in foreign language phonology will most likely result in improved pronunciation. The initial chapter is thus reviewing literature on the phonological instruction since mid-20th century when pronunciation was accepted as a linguistic property contributing to language acquisition and examining the pedagogical implications of each school of thought and theory for teaching pronunciation.

In view of the prevailing misconception that deviant phonological performance can be utterly counterbalanced by the semantic content of utterances and the immediate context and that pronunciation is of secondary or minor importance in developing learners' communicative competence, an in-depth analysis is made in the second chapter of the communicative power of intelligible pronunciation at suprasegmental level from a pragmatic point of view, particularly the most striking prosodic feature, intonation, which is often given token significance in college English curriculum, from a relevance-theoretic perspective. The focus is laid on the constraints that three systemic variables of English intonation, tonicity, tonality and tone, produce on the inferential process of utterance comprehension and the delivery of intended meanings. In addition, given that segments function as the building blocks for further suprasegmental learning and that the pitfall of the traditional mechanical drilling is apparent in the recurrence and persistence of deviant segmental forms in learners'

phonological performance for want of such models as imitated in the classroom, which often brings about communicative disturbance, the integration and instruction of segments is addressed in light of contrastive study and acoustic analysis. The pedagogical implications can be derived from their compelling explanatory power for deviant sound production so that the instructor would not feel strictly limited in what to do to help learners improve beyond their present level of pronunciation proficiency.

Furthermore, it is pointed out that acquaintance with learners' cultural frames of reference can help foreign language teachers adjust and extend patterns of communication and create the optimal classroom conditions for acquisition of English sound system. The third chapter thus concentrates on discussing diverse motivational, cognitive, and communicative styles; exploring their respective common patterns that are grounded in the Chinese cultural, social and educational context; and probing into the implications these three important components have for English pronunciation teachers to work out ways to cultivate autonomous learners with highly acceptable phonological competence for better communication. Following that sample English pronunciation lesson plans are presented in the fourth chapter to demonstrate an eclectic and communicatively effective approach to both segmental and suprasegmental features, which accounts for cognitive, affective and psycho-motor aspects of pronunciation learning in Chinese EFL classrooms as well as combines the merits already identified in the diverse pronunciation pedagogy.

Key Words: Pronunciation Pedagogy; Suprasegmental Phonology; Segmental Phonology; Cultural Frames of Reference; Motivation Styles; Cognitive Styles; Communication styles

摘要

本文回顾了与语音教学相关的教学流派,分析了影响英语言语交际的音段音位和超音段音位两方面问题及探讨了中国学习者的文化体系对中国英语语音课堂教学的启示,旨在探寻能促进中国学习者言语交际能力的行之有效的英语语音教学框架。由于语音教无定法,若教师的教学方式能整合不同外语语音研究的成果将有助于学习者语音能力的提高,因而文中的第一章主要回顾了 20 世纪中期以来有关教学理论对语音教学的影响。

鉴于目前仍存在的对语音在交际能力中所处重要性的认识不足,尤其是人们常误认为,语音对于提高学习者交际能力而言是次要的,在言语交流中话语的语义和交际场景可以完全弥补语音上的偏误使交际意图得以有效传达,文中的第二章从语用学角度深入分析了超音段音位的交际功能,特别是在大学英语教学大纲中已被边缘化的重要韵律特征之一的语调模式的语用功能,重点是以关联理论为出发点,从重音分布,调群切分和调型选择的三个方面阐述了英语语调如何在话语交际中实现其组织话语信息和推导话语意义的功能。另外,由于音段音位是超音段音位的构建之本,在语音教学中也不容忽视。传统的语音教学主要是针对音段层面上音素的机械性操练,这难以根除语音上的偏误。语音偏误在自然语流的再现及语音的石化常导致交流障碍。针对教学中的纠音之难和帮助学习者超越现有语音能力之不易,本章节又论述了对比语言学和声学分析对音段音位层面语音偏误的阐释力和对教学的指导意义。

此外,文中指出文化背景潜在地规范了对学习者所期望的学习结构形式,深入学习者的文化体系,有助于外语教师灵活调整和拓展课堂交际模式,创造出适合学生文化心理特点,认知风格,交际风格并有效提高目的语语音能力的教学设计。文中的第三章基于此主要回顾了学习动机、认知类型和课堂交际动态结构影响学习者习得目的语成效的研究,并探讨了扎根于中国文化传统、社会状况、教育背景下中国英语学习者在这三方面所体现的共同模式,从而进一步阐明了这些打上文化烙印的学习结构形式对外语教师培养中国学生语音自主学习能力和提高学生语音能力以促进其口语交际能力的启示。文中最后的教学设计范例试图融

合语音学习中的认知、情感、心理机制等因素，结合各种语音教学流派的可取之处，并体现它们在英语音段音位和超音段音位教学中的实际应用，以期帮助学习者运用语音语调有效实现其交际功能。

关键词：语音教学；超音段音位；音段音位；文化模式；学习动机；认知风格；交际风格

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Introduction

Language is the primary means of communication and intelligible pronunciation is the primary medium through which oral communicative competence gets noticed. Despite its noteworthy significance in effective and efficient use of language in natural settings and the frequent communicative disturbance caused by the recurrence of some critical deviant phonological forms, unduly little importance has been attached to explicit pronunciation pedagogy in Chinese EFL classrooms. Pronunciation is perhaps one of the least satisfactory aspects of English language teaching, as the traditional orientation towards lexical, morphological and semantic dimensions of language has long taken priority over orientation towards the communicative value of phonological forms with the principal goal of preparing learners for various standardized written exams. It may also be traceable to the popular yet dubious notion that pronunciation is an acquired skill that teachers would have least influence on. Moreover, the Critical Period Hypothesis that denies the possibility of acquiring native-like pronunciation after puberty, the time when lateralization is completed (Brown 2000:54), has exerted enormous impact on practitioners' belief in the worth of teaching pronunciation.

There might be an element of truth in the claim that preadolescents are at a more advantageous position than adults in pronunciation acquisition and a critical period of time exists for establishing native representation of the phonological system. The question is whether the critical time for target sounds intuitively accessible is virtually that critical for pronunciation learning. Investigations reveal that the cognitive capacity and the ability to self-monitor, which develop with age, however, can offset in some degree the neurological limitation as a result of the completion of lateralization. Crawford argues that "pronunciation improves through gradual monitoring of the acquired system based on conscious knowledge of the facts learned about the language" (1987:109). There is great likelihood of adults defossilizing the fossilized pronunciation by means of self-monitoring and consciousness raising, and developing intelligible and pleasant accent with the intervention of the explicit pronunciation instruction that optimizes the conditions for tapping into their cognitive potential. Pronunciation is learnable and teachable. With the recent trend towards the effective

use of spoken English for communicative purposes as the fundamental goal of language teaching, intelligible and pleasant pronunciation, an essential quality suggestive of an effective and efficient speaker of English, needs to be brought back to stage from its marginal place. It also entails the need to break away from the old rut of passive parroting in the decontextualized drilling of isolated sounds and channel the new methodology to the communicative fold.

Drilling of discrete sounds, however, are not devoid of its merits as it might be an indispensable step to the decisive changes in L1 phonological habits in view of the motor aspect of pronunciation that involves some degree of muscular activity; and communicative approach to pronunciation does not necessarily mean that foreign sound system could be automatically developed by target sound exposures and as the byproduct of learners' striving to communicate. In order to bridge the gap between the controlled practice of phonological forms and spontaneous communicative language use, and to empower learners to develop their capacity for foreign language pronunciation learning to the optimal possible degree, this paper is devoted to seeking a practical and workable scheme for English pronunciation pedagogy in Chinese EFL classrooms, which emphasizes the necessity for pronunciation teachers to be eclectic, drawing on various approaches to English pronunciation instruction; proposes integration of one most striking but often neglected communicative facet of English pronunciation features, intonation, into the course; explores the explanatory power of contrastive analysis for segmental transfer errors as well as the application of acoustic analysis for diagnosing phonological forms, which is contributive to self-evaluation and self-monitor on learners' part and constructive feedbacks formed on the instructor's part; and finally but not least in importance, suggests that it be imperative to adapt the pronunciation pedagogy to the target population, Chinese EFL learners, who, varying from individual to individual though, exhibit characteristic cognitive styles, motivation orientations and communication patterns, which are culturally bound.

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